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# Progressive Rep. Waxman slams tea party ‘extremism,’ announces retirement

by Naureen Khan (/profiles/k/naureen-khan.html) - [@naureenindc](#) (<http://www.twitter.com/naureenindc>)

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Veteran Calif. lawmaker says still opportunities for progress despite Congress’ partisanship, willful ignorance of facts

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Rep. Henry Waxman fields a flurry of phone calls in his Capitol Hill office on Thursday after he announced he would retire after 40 years in the House of Representatives. J. Scott Applewhite/AP

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., a committed champion of environmental regulation, the Affordable Care Act (<http://america.aljazeera.com/topics/topic/issue/obamacare.html>) (ACA) and strengthened public safety standards, announced his retirement from the House of Representatives Thursday after 20 terms, leaving behind an institution that has been hostile to once prolific legislators.

"I first ran for office because I believe government can be a force for good in people's lives," Waxman, 74, said in a statement released by his office. "I have held this view throughout my career in Congress. And I will leave the House of Representatives with my conviction intact. The special interests have plenty of advocates; it's the poor, the sick, and the powerless who need a champion in Congress. And that's what I've strived to be."

First elected in 1974 in the wake of the Watergate scandal, Waxman was remarkably successful in crafting legislation over his 40 years in Congress. In addition to being instrumental in writing and passing the ACA, Waxman was central to elevating the HIV/AIDS epidemic to the national spotlight and bringing services and medical care to victims. He also helped create the Children's Health Insurance Program, helped pass the Clean Air Act, and worked to fortify the regulatory powers of the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The end of his career is sure to be bittersweet: the ACA remains on politically perilous territory (<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/1/gop-electoral-plankeepthelightson.html>), with many GOP governors refusing to enact the Medicaid expansion (<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/the-stream/the-stream-officialblog/2014/1/10/americans-strugglewithmedicaidcoveragegap.html>). His last session in Congress is on track to be one of the least productive in history (<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/8/1/113th-congress-fleestownwithonly22billspassed.html>). And comprehensive legislation that Waxman authored to combat climate change (<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/9/27/earth-s-warming-extremelylikelyduetohumanactivityreport.html>) died in the Senate in 2009, with no signs of being revived.

Environmentalists nonetheless applauded his service.

"In every battle, at every juncture, in every moment that mattered most, Rep. Waxman stood up for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the lands we love and the wildlife we cherish," Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a statement. "He embodies public service of the highest order, and we are all the better for his work."

Waxman lamented the current intractable, partisan environment in Congress, but said it was neither those frustrations nor the unlikelihood of Democrats retaking the House that prompted his decision to retire.

"I abhor the extremism of the tea party Republicans," Waxman said about his decision to leave. "I am embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts, and ignoring facts. But I am not leaving out of frustration with Congress. Even in today's environment, there are opportunities to make real progress."

Waxman, a close ally of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., is among seven House Democrats and 10 House Republicans to retire in advance of the 2014 elections (<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/8/2014-midterm-electionscouldshatterspendingrecords.html>).

Prognosticators say it will be an uphill climb for Democrats to retake the chamber this year, likely meaning three more years of infighting and gridlock.

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**Santiago Alemedia** 28 days ago

Tea party candidates don't forget their promises to voters or bury their principles for party or politics. That's what makes them such a threat to go-along to get-along professional, lifetime politicians such as Waxman. Thank God for the Tea Party.  
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**john nugent** 28 days ago

Tea party political wackos have a wacko following.  
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**Mark Smerkanich** 29 days ago

I'll be sorry to see Rep Waxman leave office although he has done much to better our country and deserves a break from the Washington grind. He is a "man of the masses" and will be missed. Thanks Henry, for all you've